

Twenty members of the LTTE convicted in France

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The recent conviction and jailing of 20 members and supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in France is a flagrant assault on democratic rights. It also encourages the Sri Lankan government's continued suppression of Tamil minorities on the island nation.

Included among those convicted on November 23 by a French court was Nadaraja Matinthiran, leader of the LTTE support organisation in France, the CCTF (Co-ordinating Committee of Tamils-France). He received the longest sentence—seven years in jail—for allegedly extorting about €5 million (\$7.4 million) from France's Tamil immigrant community, which numbers about 75,000.

Two more LTTE supporters were given four years in prison and a third received six years, while the others received sentences ranging from three and a half years to six months suspended. One defendant was acquitted.

The court also ordered the dismantling of the CCTF after ruling that it was a front organisation for the LTTE. The CCTF has been functioning legally in France since 1983.

Neither when their supporters were originally arrested, nor after their harsh sentences were meted out, have LTTE representatives in France issued any statements protesting against the French state repression of their supporters. In their declarations of November 27, the traditional Hero's Day, they made no mention of prosecutions. The sentences also went unmentioned in the media in France. Neither were they reported in the publications of the "left."

The LTTE did, however, use the occasion of Hero's Day to reiterate its subordination to the imperialist powers, declaring that the Tamil Diaspora should appeal to the "concern and counsel of those international countries that care for our community. Through these structures seek to rally support of the international

community and strengthen our struggle for rights world wide."

The prosecutions are bound up with the interests of French imperialism in South Asia. In April, British and French foreign ministers David Miliband and Bernard Kouchner travelled to Sri Lanka under the pretext of their "humanitarian concern" for Tamil civilians displaced by the war. In fact, this was merely a political cover for an attempt to increase military ties with Sri Lanka and counter the growing influence of China. In a recent speech, the Sri Lankan ambassador to France remarked: "The recent call in Colombo by the French Navy ship 'le Var' gave the opportunity to restart the cooperation between the Navies of the two countries."

France's support for the so-called peace process has always been a tactical issue. The Sarkozy government was primarily concerned to end the war in Sri Lanka because it is a constant destabilising influence in South Asia, particularly in India, where France has growing economic and strategic interests. France and India also maintain a discreet "strategic dialogue" that covers joint cooperation against terrorism. Both countries have aimed to increase bilateral trade from €6.5 billion to €12 billion by 2012.

In the aftermath of the Asian tsunami in 2004, the French Agency for Development provided a €64 million loan to the then-government of Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka in an October 2005 agreement. Later this was increased with a commitment to Sri Lanka by France of €112 million to develop infrastructure, including the strategically important Trincomalee Harbour.

On August 4, 2006, 17 Sri Lankan aid workers (16 Tamils and 1 Muslim) working for the Paris-based international humanitarian agency *Action Contre La Faim* (ACF) were summarily executed in their office in Mutur, Trincomalee district. "The Security Forces of Sri Lanka are widely and consistently deemed to be responsible for the incident," according to a statement issued by the Sri

Lanka Monitoring Mission. The French ruling elite never condemned or took action against the killings of these humanitarian volunteers. The government of Mahinda Rajapaksa was never held responsible or answerable for these cold-blooded murders.

The crackdown on the LTTE supporters in France in April 2007 was in line with the banning of LTTE in the countries where there are large communities of Tamils who had fled the Sri Lankan state repression and war. It was officially banned in the EU and France in 2006. This coincided with the Rajapaksa government's campaign to neutralise the LTTE's operations throughout the world and especially in Europe. The 2007 arrests were the first time the French authorities had moved so openly against the LTTE.

Most of these convicted persons were arrested in April 2007, on charges of criminal conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism, financing of terrorism or racketeering to finance terrorism. The arrests were conducted by forces of the "Antiterrorist Directorate" on the basis of a judicial order issued by the notorious anti-terror judge Jean-Louis Bruguière. He stood for parliament that year for Sarkozy's UMP (Union for a Popular Movement).

Apart from serving the geopolitical interests of French imperialism in South Asia, Bruguière's initiative was part of the political agenda of the French bourgeoisie, articulated by Nicolas Sarkozy, of strengthening the powers of the state. These powers will be used to suppress the resistance of the working class and the youth to austerity measures imposed to enhance the profitability and competitiveness of French big business. The arrests were also timed to win the far-right vote to Sarkozy from Jean-Marie Le Pen in the presidential elections in May of that year.

The two years since the election of Sarkozy as president in 2007 have seen deep attacks on the social rights of the French working class, which have provoked protest strikes and demonstrations involving millions of workers and students. The attack on immigrants has been an integral part of these developments. Sarkozy's ever more repressive legislation against ethnic minorities (including the banning of the Muslim headscarf in schools and now the Burqa commission), against immigrants, and particularly the *sans-papiers* and those giving them aid and support, has affected Tamils and led to forced repatriations.

Condemnation of the repression of the LTTE does not imply support for its bankrupt perspective. By early 2009, the bourgeois nationalist project of the LTTE collapsed,

leading to the military defeat of the LTTE. More than 250,000 Tamil civilians were herded into camps under appalling conditions by Rajapaksa, with the complicity of the UN and the EU, including France.

The LTTE and its support organisations have used physical violence against political opponents, including members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). On several occasions, LTTE supporters attacked workers handing out leaflets advocating a socialist and internationalist perspective to defend the democratic rights of Tamils.

In France, the Co-coordinating Committee of Tamils-France resorted to threats and violence, forcibly stealing leaflets in order to prevent Tamil migrant workers who have been living in the country over 25 years from joining with their class brothers and sisters, the French working class, in a common struggle against French capitalism. The CCTF did, however, invite Communist Party and Socialist Party municipal councillors to speak at their rallies.

On May Day 2009, the LTTE showed its true class nature. When hundreds of thousands of French workers demonstrated against Sarkozy's attacks, LTTE contingents that participated in the same demonstrations carried banners with "Help us" slogans and placards with large pictures of Sarkozy and of other representatives of imperialist powers such as Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Tamil migrant workers in Europe and elsewhere should unite with their class brothers and sisters in the countries where they live on the basis of internationalist socialist perspective advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its organ the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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